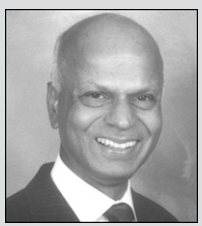


Iraq -- two years after invasion



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM
writes from Madrid

ON March 20th, 2003 President Bush launched his "Operation Iraqi Freedom" by invading a small embargo-laden Muslim country ostensibly to destroy its weapons of mass destruction and to give freedom and democracy to its people. Two years after the invasion, what is the situation today? Has Bush been able to destroy Iraq's "dreaded WMD"? Are the flowers of democracy blossoming in today's Iraq?

Iraq, today, is a wreck. It is a living hell for its inhabitants. Tens of thousands of them, who by the way, did no harm to the United States, have been slaughtered by American forces. Entire cities have been flattened by American bombardment. Many thousands are being held as prisoners under appalling conditions in sinister places like Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. No one exactly knows the exact number of prisoners who have been tortured to death. While preaching incessantly freedom, democracy, rule of law and due process, the policy of "extraordinary rendition" has been applied by the Americans to kidnap and torture innocent civilians.

Most of Iraq's infrastructure has been destroyed, including that of the petroleum industry. Unemployment is so high that people risk their lives to get any job that would give them a regular income. Food and water are scarce. Under the best of circumstances, electricity is available only for a few hours. The sewage system does not work. There is no security. Violent death for the Iraqis can come at any moment from the insurgents or American forces. Factionalism is rampant and a full-blown civil war is in the offing. This, in short, is the sorry state of affairs in Iraq, two years after Bush sent his tanks into Iraq. But has Bush achieved his much-publicised goal of destroying Iraq's WMD?

No, because they did not exist. Bush's own arms inspectors have failed to find any trace of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. This was confirmed in a report signed by Charles Duelfer, a US arms inspector, who acted as head of the Iraq Survey Group. It should be mentioned here that the UN weapons inspectors, who before the start of the invasion had found no WMD in Iraq, were completely discredited by the Bush administration and had been barred from

entering Iraq since the start of the invasion. So much for Bush's principal rationale for invading Iraq. Now what about establishing democracy in Iraq?

I confess, I have been rather bemused by some pseudo-scholarly discussions in the Western media about how democratic the recently held Iraqi election has been and how it would advance the cause of freedom in Iraq and beyond. How can democracy be introduced at the point of a bayonet by an occupier? Actually this so-called election was very much like the one held in Vietnam under another American administration. They were

election will be circumscribed by its actions by the laws decreed by him before he left Baghdad, last year.

Now let us look at the election itself. Was it such a huge success as the American spin masters would like us to believe? Reading some of these self-congratulatory reports in the American press, one may even reach the conclusion that for the greater good of the Iraqis, it was perfectly legitimate for Bush to violate all international laws and invade their country.

Iraq has got a population of roughly 28 million people, of which approximately 60 per cent are Shiites and 35 per cent Sunnis

one way or the other, depend on the huge American military and civilian apparatus in Iraq for their survival, the real number of Iraqis who freely exercised their votes was even less. However, I must mention that it is not my intention to underestimate the courage of the Shiite people, whatever their number was, who freely cast their votes against such odds, hoping that it would bring an early end to the occupation.

This also demonstrates the desperate situation of the Iraqis. They are prepared to grab any opportunity which might eventually give them back some semblance of normal life in the midst of all this chaos. So much for Bush's stated goals for the invasion. Let us be frank about it. I am inclined to agree with Joseph T Seigle and Morton H. Halperin, when they say, "The essential point is that establishing democracy was not the rationale for these military interventions. It has always been an after-the-fact justification for other priorities..."

The real reasons for starting this illegal and immoral war were first, to turn Iraq into a client state whose government would allow the establishment of permanent American military bases in Iraq to protect Israeli and American interests and second, to control Iraq's huge oil reserves. So the question is: How is Bush doing as far as these real goals are concerned?

At first glance, one may be tempted to conclude that he is doing quite well. A Shiite-Kurdish coalition government will most probably emerge out of this so-called election. Iraqi security forces (mainly Shiites) are being trained to do the fighting and dying for the Americans. Military bases are being built at a breakneck pace to house American forces, who from behind will be able to control not only the Iraqi government but also intervene in neighbouring countries to protect American and Israeli interests. Although at present the oil industry infrastructure is crumbling, American military physically controls the world's second largest oil reserves. But a closer look will reveal some flaws in this conclusion. Will the Sunnis give up their fight? Will there be a civil war? Will the Shiites allow Iraq to become a client state? Will they not try to repeal Bremer's decrees? Will they accept American bases on Iraqi soil? Will they accept American control of Iraqi oil reserves? How soon will they ask for an end of the occupation? Will the Turks accept the rise of Kurdish power on their borders with good grace? These are difficult questions to answer now with any degree of certainty. But two things look fairly certain, there will be no peace in Iraq in the foreseeable future and that the Americans will try to use this as an excuse to prolong their stay in Iraq as long as possible.

(including Arabs and Kurds). Because of past British colonial policy the Sunni Arabs had until the invasion exercised power in Iraq. The Shiites were discriminated against and the Kurds were persecuted. Therefore, the Kurds, who have been allowed to set up autonomous regions in the North by the occupying power and who now nurture the hope of independence were the only ones who voted massively (80%) in this election. The Shiites, despite their being the majority group, have so far been marginalised. Now they see an opportunity to gain power. Although fiercely anti-American, they feel that the Americans are helping them in an indirect manner to come to power. Their leader Grand Ayatulla Sistani asked them to participate in the election with the assurance that once the new Shiite majority government is formed, it will insist on a clear timetable for the Americans to leave.

So, as far as hard facts are concerned, we know that of the total number of registered voters (14 million), 8.5 million people voted, which gives us a percentage of 60. But it does not take into account the total number of eligible voters, which according to most observers was 20 million. So the percentage of eligible voters who actually cast their votes was a little more than 42.

A further analysis will show that the real percentage of Arab voters was even smaller. Of the three million Kurdish eligible voters, 2.2 million went to the polls. If we deduct 2.2 million Kurdish voters from 8.5 million, the total number of Arab voters was approximately 6.3 million (most of whom were Shiites because the Sunnis boycotted the election), which was roughly 37 per cent of the total number of Arab eligible voters. If one deducts the number of people who cast their votes because they,

LETTER FROM EUROPE

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organised not to give freedom to the people but "to further entrench the occupier's interests".

This was a "secret" election. Everything was a secret. According to the *Washington Post*, "almost none of the 7700 candidates for the National Assembly campaigned publicly or even announced their names". Only people, who knew who they were, were the Americans. All of them were vetted by the occupying power -- a fine example of how a free election should be conducted! So the voters did not know who the candidates were, what their programmes were and until the last minute where the polling stations were. There were no impartial international outside observers present to certify the veracity of the results. This election was a sham.

All the new instruments of governance including the electoral law and the election commission depended entirely on the occupying power and its hand-picked stooges. It is not true that after all the talk of seeking collaboration from the United Nations in finding an interim government, at the last moment Lakhdar Brahimi, the special representative of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, was completely side-tracked and the person appointed to the prime minister's position was no other than Iyad Allawi, a CIA-linked politician who had earned the friendship and trust of Bush's pro-consul Bremer? Brahimi, who spent weeks talking to many religious and political groups trying to find some sort of consensus on who should lead the interim government, was not even consulted when Bremer chose Allawi. In spite of all this, Bremer did not want to take any chances with the outcome of the election. He saw to it that whatever government that emerges out of this

Integrating agriculture with industry

MD SAYEED HOSSAIN

AGRICULTURE is the most vibrant sector in our country with tremendous potentialities. This is because of the fact that the agricultural products have some inherent advantages to make them competitive in the world market. The inherent advantages are fertility of land, cheap labour force while the economy itself is agro based. But the key to economic development lies in the integration of agriculture with industry for more value addition and creation of employment opportunity, the paramount need of the hour.

In market economy, the world has become a single market where goods are sold at a competitive price but with quality and buyers don't bother whether they are imported or indigenous. With the advent of WTO movement of goods and capital have been made free almost all over the world. And as such, every country would prefer importing to producing if the import price is more competitive. Accordingly, the economic policy as well as the industry policy of any country should be devised keeping in view the viability and cost competitiveness of products. However, to make the products viable it should possess some inherent advantages of competitive edge to overrule the price in the world market. This advantage may be due to some favourable conditions such as availability of raw materials locally, low project cost, cheap labour etc leading to cost competitiveness which are mostly inherent.

There may be other factors such as minimum lead time, export benefits in the form of cash incentive, tax holiday, subsidised rate of gas, electricity, transport or any special favour from the developed countries / respective importing country resulting from the bilateral treaty etc which may substantially contribute to keep the price of the products reasonably low and to make it competitive in the world market. But these facilities are mostly the logistic supports and temporarily mobilised to favour the sector. Similar advantages such as, Quota offered by US and GSP facilities in EU for our RMG sector actually favoured the exporters to keep the price competitive in importers' countries as we experienced. Besides, the cheap labour of our country, attainment of skills and effective marketing network of the exporters also added further competitiveness in this sector.

If we look at the industrial development in China, India and Pakistan, definitely their textile sector would be in the focal point. But if we go back to the success story of the textile industries in those countries the inherent advantage of the sector would be considered as the key to success, which is the indigenous production of basic raw

material i.e. cotton, obviously an agricultural item. In fact, China, India and Pakistan are getting prerogative in textile because of its inherent advantage of cotton production and effective integration of agricultural products with industry. Thus the agriculture sector in those countries contributed substantially for its development. What caused China, India and Pakistan to keep their RMG products competitive is the inherent advantages of local raw materials such as fabrics/yarns/ cotton as well as cheap labour. Obviously, other factors may be there but those are auxiliary not the prime. Thus the countries got absolute prerogative in RMG export. In fact, the effective integration of agriculture with industry in those countries really made it possible to lead the world apparel

country. What we call as the main impediment to development is the lack of security of life and property caused due to frustration among the millions of educated unemployed youths. However, the bare truth is not only to devise best policy but to implement the same and the real success lies in its effective execution, the most difficult and challenging job the country is facing.

In this context, it may please be noted that the agricultural sector in our country is the most accommodating field to ease the unemployment problem using the land in diversified ways to derive competitive benefits. As we know around 80 percent of our people live in rural areas where agriculture is the main occupation and they also depend on agriculture for their livelihood. The infrastructure

working capital to meet the running cost. But the rural people apparently lack such cash capital. In this respect we may bring into discussion the supportive role of our urban people who may be interested to go for investment in the rural areas because of higher return. The urban people may have idle funds to be invested. As per social structure most of our urban people have rural origin and due to obvious reasons they have inherent weakness for their native villages and also feel obliged to do some thing for it.

In recent times we have seen that many urban people have invested their money in the rural areas in shrimp and or other fish cultivation. Such outlook of urban people needs to be protected and promoted ensuring security of life and property of the investors. This is equally applicable to the total investment scenario of the country. Initiative may be taken from different aspects so that the urban people may occasionally visit their native villages and exchange views with the rural people. This would definitely boost pro-village outlook of urban people and help enrich the rural areas in different ways as well as bridge down the gap between the urban and rural economy.

The balanced growth of economy depends on equitable distribution of resources between urban and rural areas. The government has already realised such reality and emphasised that "our main goal would be to transfer resources to rural areas from urban areas in the budget". Obviously, to increase economic activities in the rural areas is very important to generate income for the rural people which in turn would increase purchasing power of the people creating demand for goods and services. Increased purchasing power of the rural people will have far reaching effect on the economy of the country as majority of the people live in the villages. Many countries, particularly US, Germany and China, have taken up measures to increase the consumption level of their people.

It may further be noted that for the balanced growth of our economy as well as for distribution of income among the rural people, decentralisation of industries has become imperative. The clustering of industries around Dhaka city has caused huge migration of the rural people to urban centres due to unemployment problem in the rural areas. It is difficult to stop such inflow of rural people by enforcement of law if economic activities are not geared up in the villages to support them with income. In fact, creation of avenues for income of the rural people is the real solution our overall problem.

It is worth mentioning that the traditional system of cultivation is being replaced mechanised and intensive system by making the products although costlier but increased in volume and obviously competitive. This mechanised system of cultivation to some extent is capital intensive and also needs

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market. We should also follow the same model to lead the country ahead.

RMG sector in Bangladesh is now in the midst of stiff competition in a quota free regime. Quota has gone in January 2005 as per WTO agreement. Withdrawal of Quota facility has really made the prospect of our RMG export very hard and the future can only tell how good the RMG of Bangladesh will compete in the world apparel market. But one thing is crystal clear that to make our RMG export competitive under WTO, development of backward linkage industry is a must. There is no denying the fact that viability for establishment of such backward linkage in RMG sector will largely depend on the availability of indigenous basic raw material i.e. production of cotton. Hence, for the growth/survival of our RMG sector in the long run, cultivation of cotton has now become imperative and such cultivation has to be undertaken in the selected areas considering the suitability of land. Thus agriculture should be integrated to industry for the development of the country.

The industrial policy of any country is commonly devised in the perspective of its socio economic infrastructure. In Bangladesh beset with over population we should evidently pursue the policy of establishing labour intensive industries than the capital incentive ones to ease the unemployment problem. It is worth mentioning that the effect of unemployment problem is far reaching and may be termed as the root of all social unrest in the

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